

T³: Trustee Training Tips

Number 5 Volume 3 Kentucky Department for Libraries & Archives Autumn 2004

A YEAR IS A YEAR IS A YEAR

There are many ways of measuring a year: it may be a calendar year, running from January to December; a state fiscal year, from July to June; a federal fiscal year, from October to September; the time between important events in one's life, such as birthdays or wedding anniversaries. Some years aren't even a full twelve months in duration—a school year, for example.

Perhaps, in the big picture, a twelve month period is flexible and fluid, but in the sense that public library trustees need to define a year, it is quite rigid. Never mind the numerous reports and filing deadlines a board requires of its director, the focus of this article is on *trustee term years*.

Every single library board in Kentucky has its own unique term year. Every single member of any given library board has the same beginning and ending month and day as every other member. The differences come in the year in which terms expire, but more about that later. Many boards get off kilter when filling unexpired vacancies. This does not impact the term year in any way—including the month and day. Let's look at an example for better clarity. Suppose John Doe is appointed to a term of four years that runs from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2003. But lucky John Doe wins the lottery and moves to the Caribbean, resigning his term on November 17, 2001. On December 1, 2001 his replacement, Jane Notsolucky, is appointed to fill his unexpired term. Jane's term will end on June 30, 2003. Notice that her term's expiration date is in no way affected by her December appointment date; she maintains the term dates of John Doe, whose unexpired term she is finishing. Should both Jane and the board wish it, she is eligible to serve two full terms of four years each after she finishes John's term. In this example, Jane could serve as a trustee from December of 2001 until June 30, 2011. This is why it is especially important to pick only top quality people when filling out unexpired terms; some could be on your board for 11 years and 11 months and still not break the statute that limits terms.

A final word about the *year* in which terms expire. The original board, created when the library was legally established, was set up on a stagger so no more than two trustees' terms would expire at the same time. If your board has more than two completing terms in any given year, your stagger has become skewed and needs to be "fixed." Ask your regional consultant to research your board's appointment history to find the error and then correct it.

AN AMERICAN FREEDOM

Have you ever heard these questions? “Why should we pay for a public library when we have school libraries all over the county that we’re already supporting? “With computers and the Internet, why do we need a public library anymore?”

Beginning with the colonists arriving in America during the 1600’s, communities started establishing public libraries as a government service for the people. Benjamin Franklin founded the first lending library in Philadelphia in 1731. In 1809 Thomas Jefferson, whose personal book collection was the foundation for today’s Library of Congress, wrote, “I have often thought that nothing would do more extensive good at the small expense than the establishment of a small circulating library in every county, to consist of a few well-chosen books, to be lent to the people of the county, under such regulations as would secure their safe return in due time.”

The United States is the first country in the history of the world where citizens established and maintained a system of free public libraries, open to all, a basic freedom as a result of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Public libraries are an American value, born of the idea that a free people should have free access to all kinds of information. In practice that means that libraries give citizens access to a full spectrum of ideas that allows us to learn what we want, explore many points of view, and make informed decisions. This even includes some types of materials and ideas we might not necessarily agree with or choose for our children or ourselves.

In 1953, President Eisenhower wrote, “The libraries of America are and must ever

remain the home of free, inquiring minds. To them, our citizens must be able to turn with clear confidence that there they can freely seek the whole truth.”

As we race headlong into a technological age that is sure to surprise us in ways we can’t even imagine, it is important to remember Eisenhower’s words. Public libraries will remain the solid foundation from which information will flow. But only if we, the citizens who use and benefit from libraries, support them as the keepers of our freedom to read, learn, and connect.

Today’s libraries are more vital than ever. Most of us could never afford to buy the books, magazines, videos, CDs, software, and computers the library offers our families. And contrary to popular belief, the majority of Americans do not have online connections at home. For those without Internet access at home, work, or school, research shows that libraries are the number one place for access.

So, what is a public library?

1. It is more than a building: it is a staff ready to help customers of all ages search for knowledge, information, and entertainment. In addition, the staff will provide assistance in the use of the materials and equipment in the library.
2. It has lots of resources to help parents teach their preschoolers to learn to read. By using the library early and often for both learning and pleasure, children develop the critical thinking skills they need to succeed in school and throughout their lives. And that includes that inevitable time when they’re the ones who run the world.

3. It has lots of resources to help elementary, secondary, and college students do their homework and school projects, especially at times when the school libraries are closed or don't have what is needed.
4. It is a place for self education and lifelong learning, exploration, and examination. Customers can investigate any topic of particular interest to them—for delight or to increase their personal skills—such as adults finding help learning to read.
5. It is, with its computers, an access point to the Internet and its wide range of resources. Someone has written that the Internet is the best library in the world, but all its books are strewn all over the floor. A real problem with the Internet is that information found there may be incomplete, out-of-date, factually wrong, biased, or just plain pranks. Since no one evaluates or edits the material on the Internet, anybody can publish anything. What the Internet needs is a good librarian, and one can be found at the local public library.
6. It supports local economic development, finding information needed by local businesses and government officials, including entrepreneurs wanting to start new businesses.
7. It offers an abundance of recreational reading, viewing, and listening materials just for fun and pleasure. It is interesting to note in this age of computers that more books are being published and sold today than at any time in our country's history.
8. It is evidence of the quality of a community's life and what government officials think of their

residents. It provides some of the tools to help us live. A community without a healthy, growing public library is not a healthy, growing place.

Although libraries don't always look like they've changed, they are changing and dynamic places that exist and adjust to meet the needs and interests of their communities.

The library is a window to the world, helping enrich our minds, defend our right to know, safeguard our freedoms, and keep democracy healthy. All one has to do to take advantage of these services (prepaid with our tax dollars) is walk through the door.

And your responsibility? Support this gift to ourselves and our community. And, when in doubt, go to the library.

Don B Reynolds, Jr
Nolichucky (TN) Regional Library
Reprinted with permission

T³:Trustee Training Tips is published quarterly by the Field Services Division of the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives. Correspondence should be addressed to the editor, Nelda Moore, at Lincoln Trail Regional Office, 201 West Dixie Avenue, Suite One, Elizabethtown 42701-1533. Phone 270.766.5222; Fax 270.766.5273; e-mail: nelda.moore@ky.gov.

Serving Kentucky's Need to Know



An agency of the Education Cabinet

LIBRARY LETTERS

Dear Marian Librarian,

Our library is small enough to only have to do an audit every four years. At audit time, do we audit only one year or the three preceding it as well?

– Troubled Trustee

Dear Troubled,

Audits, as you appear to know, are required only every four years for libraries whose budgets are under \$400,000. (They are required annually for those over this amount.) The every fourth year audit covers only that one year; think of it as a snapshot of the library's financial state at that time. There is nothing to prevent a library from doing it more often, however, if they so desire. Just remember you are required to have a specific kind of audit, commonly referred to as a Yellow Book Audit and the auditor must be certified to do such audits.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

The following quiz will let you test your knowledge on the topics covered in this publication. The answers are under "Publications" on KDLA's web page <www.kdlaky.gov>.

1. How does filling a sudden vacancy on the board impact the replacement's term expiration?
2. What should your library do if four trustees' second terms are expiring at the same time?
3. Why are public libraries important to our country's form of government?
4. Name three "roles" the public library has in any community. Which apply best to your specific library? Why did you select these roles?
5. What kind and how often is your library required to have an audit?

ANSWERS TO T³ QUIZ:

1. How does filling a sudden vacancy on the board impact the replacement's term expiration? [page 1]

It does not. The terms are cast in concrete and do not change regardless of who is in them. So, all members of any board must have all their terms expiring at the date day and month. The years are in a stagger, however. See next question.

2. What should your library do if four trustees' second terms are expiring at the same time? [page 1]

You are in violation of the statute that originally established your library and set up your original board, as it is legally impossible for four terms (of a five member board) to be expiring in the same year. At no time should more than two be expiring at the same time. Whether or not it is the trustee's first or second term does not matter. For boards with more than five, legally appointment, voting board members (this does NOT mean Advisory Board members), the stagger is spelled out in statute. If you cannot find this readily, or do not understand the language as it applies to your library, contact your regional consultant for clarification. Now, what to do if you find your library in this awkward situation: contact your regional consultant immediately and explain your situation. A carefully researched history of board appointments will need to be made to determine which term has gotten off schedule. This can be fixed, but the full board must understand that someone's current term is going to expire sooner or later than expected. This situation more than likely came about by someone filling an unexpired vacancy and the library thinking the replacement's term started new. The rule of thumb is: the term never changes; only the people holding them do.

3. Why are public libraries important to our country's form of government?

Information to the people is essential for the people to have a say in their governments. One would hope that say would be an informed one, freely available to anyone seeking it. This is what democracy is all about. Notice the quotes from Thomas Jefferson and Dwight Eisenhower. Others abound to fortify this position and can be obtained from a number of sources. Ask your regional consultant to provide some if you need them. Remember, too, that Benjamin Franklin is considered the father of American public libraries.

4. Name three defining elements the public library has in any community. Which apply best to your specific library? Why did you select these?

Pages 2-3 provide an annotated list of 8 key elements for all public libraries. All should apply to your library, but which three you thought more important than the other five is totally up to you. This might be a worthwhile discussion at an upcoming board meeting as it gives you an opportunity to discuss what each thinks regarding the philosophy of public library service for your specific community.

5. What kind and how often is your library required to have an audit?

That depends upon your bottom line. For libraries with budgets under \$400,000 the audit must be done only once every four years. This audit covers only the fourth year, not the entire four years between audits. For libraries with budgets over \$400,000, the audit must be done annually. Regardless of size and frequency of audit, said audit must be done by a CPA certified to do governmental auditing—commonly known as a Yellow Book Audit. These are a bit more pricey than “regular” audits, but are required by statute.